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THE BRONTË SISTERS.¹

IN "the Haworth Edition" the Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. in England, and the Messrs. Harper & Brothers in this country, have worked together intelligently toward bringing about a worthy memorial and a definitive edition of the works of the Brontë sisters. In the case of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë," with an Introduction and Notes by Mr. Clement K. Shorter, which constitutes the seventh volume of the edition and fittingly concludes the series, this has unquestionably been done. Nothing seems wanting that the reader has a right to know, and the lover of letters, both student and critic alike, will turn to this accurate and devoted edition for many years to come, and all future discussions of the "Life" must be based upon it. Of late years the Brontë "literature" has been steadily growing, and Mr. Shorter, in his "Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle" (London: Stodder & Houghton; New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1896), had evidenced his mastery over the material and all transmitted traditions. We now have letters complete that originally were given only in fragmentary form, and the chief additions (Charlotte's letters to her publishers—to Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams) reveal a new and growing side of her nature in the closing years of her life, without contradicting any former impressions. Indeed, the remarkable and interesting fact is that the total impression left by Mrs. Gaskell's sympathetic biography, written soon after Charlotte's death—the worthy tribute of one noble woman to another spiritually akin—is nowhere altered, but merely strengthened and confirmed by the fresh material and the fuller knowledge at hand. Looking back nearly half a century to a work written while the subject was still the tar-

¹ The Haworth Edition. "Life and Works of the Sisters Brontë." With Prefaces by Mrs. Humphry Ward, and an Introduction and Notes to the Life by Clement K. Shorter. In seven volumes. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1900.

get of numberless shafts of attack and much varied discussion, our admiration of the sympathy, tact, justice, and truth of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" is unbounded. Mrs. Gaskell achieved an immortality by this linking of her name with that of her literary kinswoman of the Yorkshire moors.

All seven volumes are generously and interestingly interspersed with illustrations, many of them reproduced from photographs in order to visualize as far as possible the scenes and setting of the "Life" and novels. Thus, in the "Life" we are conducted to Haworth first by a "distant view;" then along the "Main Street" of the village, where the hard cobblestones of the narrow winding street and the steep ascent come out clear; and so to "the parsonage" above the church, crowning the hill like an Acropolis, and surrounded with gloomy rows of tombstones in place of flower beds. Farther beyond are the far-reaching wild Yorkshire moors and cloudland, suggesting the dusky variations of color they are said to possess. One may imagine himself wearily climbing the toilsome way through the village to the top, along with the Rev. Patrick Brontë, the new incumbent of Haworth, accompanied by a sick wife, the mother of six tiny children, five girls and one boy, the oldest being scarcely seven and the youngest a babe in her arms. The illustrations undoubtedly help to make handsome volumes of the set. The only drawback is, however interesting in themselves and admirable as pictures, they give an objective feeling of aloofness. The Brontë air is lacking. They are too modern, too coldly new and clean-looking, too comfortable even. It is an inevitable attribute of modern photographic art. The mental pictures of many of these scenes are warmer and softer, or harsher and uglier, it may be, as the imagination is feasted between the lines. In reproducing the associations of memory and imagination, the utter realism of the photograph must fail. A concrete example of this feeling is in the two pictures of the Revs. Patrick Brontë and A. B. Nicholls, respectively. The Patrick Brontë here reproduced could be the father of these girls, but the A. B. Nicholls here given (it is dated some twelve years after his wife's death) is not that

of Charlotte Brontë's husband. There is a spiritual incongruity. Somehow it seems too sleek and prosperous, adjectives we never dream of connecting with Charlotte Brontë herself. To cite a final example, the artist's picture of Rochester with Jane Eyre is anything but the Rochester of Jane Eyre's reality and Charlotte Brontë's imagination. Before leaving the mechanical handling, there are a few slips, though slight, here and there discernible in the printing and division of words, something apparently almost unavoidable even with the greatest care.

It is the personality of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë which justifies this memorial edition, and this personality is stamped upon every page of these volumes. That this is so in the "Life" may be surmised from what has already been said, and that it is so in the six remaining volumes comprising the novels (including the small amount of poetry) will soon be gathered from a perusal of Mrs. Humphry Ward's luminous introductions. Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. were the original publishers of Charlotte Brontë's works, and facsimiles of the title-page of the first editions are in every instance reproduced. These gentlemen were her friends, as they were the friends of Thackeray and of many men and women of letters; they were the publishers of Thackeray's magazine, the *Cornhill*, and the personal reminiscences of Sir George M. Smith, head of the publishing house, in recent numbers of the *Cornhill*, have added zest to this renewed Brontë interest. Happy was Charlotte Brontë in her publishers, as happy as Emily and Anne were unhappy in theirs; and, apart from the question of less robust health and the earlier deaths of the younger sisters, we may reasonably wonder whether better circumstances might not have affected their relative output.

It is just this "personality" that is too frequently overlooked, as by a writer to the "Contributor's Club" in a current number of the *Atlantic Monthly*. To him or to her "Jane Eyre" is but another idol fallen by a second reading, a work long proclaimed as original, but actually containing elements of melodrama as old as the hills. We believe we

have read somewhere that Mr. William Shakespeare was also not very careful about using matter that was as time-honored and time-worn as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But of the fiercely passionate, self-repressed personality that speaks everywhere in the book and mingles these elements in such a way as to make the result like itself alone—of all this not a word. There will be many readers like the *Atlantic's* who will find old situations dressed over, faults of construction and exaggerations a plenty in "Jane Eyre" and the other works; to whom "Wuthering Heights" will be but an incoherent volume and the characters impossible. They are sincere. And no less sincere is this tribute of the Hawthorne Edition on the part of the publishers to one of the most interesting groups of personalities they have encountered in their business existence. And to every lover of individuality in letters these volumes constitute a record which can never fail in interest, where imagination and reality, fancy and fact, touched fingers in the fatality hovering over the lives of this strange household of rare genius. This spiritual truth remains despite all the demonstrations of the critics and changes of fashion, and it is in this spiritual appeal of natures of repressed pain and passion that the Brontë lives and the Brontë writings attract us to-day and will remain of perennial interest.

The addition of Mrs. Ward's name and personality to those of Mrs. Gaskell and the Brontës brings us up with a sharp start to to-day. Mrs. Ward's position in literature and her particular part in the development of the purpose and psychological novel is universally admitted. She continues the splendid line of women writers of fiction extending through the century: Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, and George Eliot, though she derives more from the last and possibly less from the Brontës than from any of those named. "'Tis sixty years after," and we know how the attitude toward even greater names has become changed. Mrs. Ward's critical introductions speak much for the breadth of judgment and catholicity of temper and mind to which she has attained. Differences in point

of view between the middle and the close of the century we expect and find; but we find also what we cannot always expect: the large amount of sympathy and insight Mrs. Ward has brought to her task. Were she of Charlotte Brontë's own day and school, indeed, we should have many more misgivings. It is because she is true to herself and her convictions, and yet does not fail to recognize in the work of fellow-workmen that which does and must live—this stamp of personality—that we are brought to a perception, more closely analyzed and clearly defined, it may be, than some older and vaguer convictions, of that in these volumes which belongs not to a day, but to a life and race. We are in better position both to understand Charlotte and Emily Brontë's hold upon fame, and to pay tribute to Mrs. Ward's wide comprehension and generousness of mind.

All attempts, including Mrs. Ward's, at explaining the genius of these Brontës are futile. They throw light upon the fact of that genius and the circumstances under which it developed, but they do not explain the thing itself. Perhaps Mr. Swinburne's words—one of those pointed thrusts for which Mr. Swinburne's criticisms, however mingled with extravagance and invective, are noted—contain as much truth as anything that can be said: "A dark, unconscious instinct, as of primitive nature worship." This was said in token of Emily's marked originality and isolation, but is sufficiently true of the entire family. This closeness to nature, to the bleak, desolate, heathery hills, is a trait never lost. Characteristic mountaineers were the natives: "The attachments, the antipathies, and the hospitalities of the district are ardent, hearty, and homely. Cordiality in each is the prominent characteristic. As a people, these mountaineers have ever been accessible to gentleness and truth, so far as I have known them; but excite suspicion or resentment, and they give emphatic and not impotent resistance. Compulsion they defy." ("Life," p. 33.) In this country and among these people the sensitive girls were brought up, and in their untrammelled imaginations they spiritually understood the people, just as they would wander out miles over the gray and purple

moorlands and sit and muse and brood with the very hills and hollows. Of such things is much that would seem inexplicable and abnormal in both "*Wuthering Heights*" and "*Jane Eyre*." In the elements that entered into these natures, if Celtic inheritance from an Irish father and a Cornish mother did much—and Mrs. Ward is prone to overemphasize this—the environment and circumstances of their bringing up did far more.

Intimacy with the old Yorkshire woman, Tabby, who came as nurse and remained to be one more dependent in this home upon the spirit of these girls, gave them unconsciously further insight into human nature of the Yorkshire type. Tabby had many bits of folklore, uncanny superstitions and blood-curdling tragedies of the past, with which to people the wild moors, and she invested them with new associations for the awe-struck, interested children. Like the fairies in Chaucer's "*Wife of Bath's Tale*," these figures of folklore had been driven away from every holt and heath—in this instance by the woolen mills, the prejudice against which, for this and other reasons, is revealed in the early chapters of "*The Professor*," and forms a large part of "*Shirley*." It is from the vivid realization of this harsh, tragic spirit of the moor and heathland that come the strange conceptions of Emily's "*Wuthering Heights*," typical of the position of their own home at the top of the bleak hill amid its whitened tombstones subject to every wind and storm that blew.

Charlotte is hardly ten when, the mother and two elder sisters dying, she must take the place of mother to this sensitive, intense, and impressionable family. Add the early loss of sisters and mother, the morbidity of the situation at home, acquaintance with tragedy personally and imaginatively, to the desolate surroundings and intense imagination of the inherited Celtic nature, and we have some of the varied elements present to nurture this strange household. But this explains merely the soil, and not the plant itself.

Being motherless, another great influence upon these children in their early years, most evident in Charlotte as the eldest, was that of their father. He must have stood for

some of the positive qualities that go to make up Mr. Helstone in "Shirley," for he too was a notorious Tory and Churchman to whom God gave a soldier's spirit with a priest's vocation. He interested these tots in his own political enthusiasms of the eighteen twenties and thirties, and the Iron Duke became the family idol. Their mental food was furnished by the Leeds *Intelligencer*, "a most excellent Tory newspaper edited by Mr. Wood, and the proprietor, Mr. Henneman." Indications of this stout Toryism, hearty admiration for Wellington, and very positive and outspoken opinions on the Catholic question, intensified by the sojourn in Brussels, may be found expressly in "Shirley," but also in every one of Charlotte's writings. Habits of close observation and clear analysis were early formed for all by the family discussions, the chief point of sympathetic contact the father seems to have had with his daughters. Left to themselves for amusement, as mere children they must talk and make speeches and write. They edit "Little Magazines," in which fancy and language "run riot, sometimes to the very border of apparent delirium," and the supernatural stories of old Tabby found fruitful ground.

Extensive "works" were written by all three children, even at this early age. Poems followed, too, those we have of Charlotte's showing the influence of Wordsworth and Nature. In appearance never handsome, small and painfully near-sighted, defects she invests her characters with, notably in "The Professor" with a change of sex, there must have been something quaint and old-fashioned in Charlotte's looks to bring out Mrs. Gaskell's likeness to a "Venetian portrait." The first schooling at Cowan Bridge is known from the Lowood of "Jane Eyre." The two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, eleven and ten years old respectively, died there. Charlotte was only eight and Emily six—fearful thought at this tender age away at school! There could be only bitter memories. The second schooling was at Roe Head, only twenty miles away, but in a softer country, making a healthier appeal to imaginative agencies. It was a country associated with traditions of Robin Hood, and

one where old and new civilizations met—mill hands and farmers, the new factories of enterprising business men and the old dwellings and estates of Yorkshire esquires, not unlike changes to be observed to-day in portions of our Southern States. This is the setting of “*Shirley*,” and its incidents—the foreign proprietor, the storming of the mill, and the struggle between insecurity to life and property and utter starvation and blind, narrow despair—were all facts and traditions of the neighborhood. The story-telling goes on: Charlotte tells weird tales to her roommates at night, and they scream out loud in their intense interest. But the opportunities for healthy exercise of the imagination become few. The presence of grief grows, a self-consciousness tinged with morbidness creeps on and the gloom increases, to be dispersed again and again, only to return.

Moreover these women were to know the tragedy of soul life and death in their hearts and home. All willing sacrifices of sisters were made for the brother, and there was worse than no reward. Not only could they imagine monsters of cruelty from rude Yorkshire nursery tales; they could draw from the horrors of life too, crucifying all the tenderest sensibilities. It was Emily who remained tenderest to her wayward brother; it was Emily whose imagination portrays the brutality often pronounced absurd in “*Wuthering Heights*,” and poor little Anne, the frailest, with Branwell’s excesses before her, writes “*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.” If we may not accept, at least we can understand these books.

These were passionate and heroic souls. It is Charlotte who, in the totality of her work as in her plans and guidance, creates a new world for the family and deserves her preëminence. Emily is confessed the most original of the household, yet it is her sister’s noble tribute that has been the strongest foundation for this fame—and Emily was not so practical a worker as Charlotte. Anne, the youngest and most timid and least able to cope with the great outside world she dreamed vaguely of and knew so little about, *had* to write with such a pair of elder sisters in the house. For scribbling, make-believe, and then serious work, was their pas-

time and salvation from the beginning. Amid it all, the curtain is drawn silently and reverently over the one whom these sisters persuaded themselves almost to the last was to become the genius of the house, their brother Branwell. The peculiar Brontë reticence is everywhere as to him, and we respect it nor wish to know more. Only this we can see in the very repression: his dark spirit hovers in the background in all the shock of the terrible revelation to these high-strung and intense feminine sensibilities, mingling with the gloom of the moors beyond and the isolation of the parsonage and the lives within. In the imagination the notes held back become even more tragic. It is the depth of spiritual experience, and not the variety and extent of external impressions, that determines the ultimate call to the heart and soul.

These external changes were few; the school life in the two very different mental surroundings, positions as governess, the Brussels scheme for more thorough preparation as teacher which Charlotte's dauntless spirit succeeded in carrying through for herself and Emily—the one revolutionary influence in their life—and again back at home in the grim parsonage taking charge of her father and its inmates, and the period of the novels. The facts in this limited experience were used again and again in all Charlotte Brontë's works: in "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley," as has been seen, and the Brussels life was the basis of "Villette," a working over of the early material of the rejected "Professor."

Nature and truth she affected to follow, as she understood them, but everything was invested with imagination: the moors, the church and parsonage, the schools, the homes and scenes she visited, the Brussels sojourn, the rapid changes transforming a rural into an industrial population. These elements come to the fore again and again, but the light of imagination that plays about them lends them a new interest.

The school life of these motherless children where two die, and the life a sensitive governess may endure, are livid heart pictures. Some souls can suffer so, and these Brontës did. Lowood was based on fact, but fact as translated by intense sensibilities. Spiritual experiences were wrought in

the alembic of deep feelings and passions. And thus arose exaggerations and morbidness. The position of governess that all of them experienced was repugnant to all. The untamable Emily could live imaginatively among the moors alone. Charlotte and little Anne—a reflex of Charlotte in being the youngest under her guidance—tell out of their heart their governess feelings: Anne, in the simple story of “*Agnes Grey*” and Charlotte as *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe*, and with a change of sex as *The Professor*, and the proud tutor, *Louis Moore*, who alone is held worthy of the high heiress *Shirley*. We must not take subjective impressions too literally for facts. These spirits could not brook restraint: to their untamable natures it was awful. Charlotte admits, in a letter to her “*dear Ellen*” Nussey, “qualities in which all our family are singularly deficient.”

Their entrance upon authorship is characteristic. The intensity of these natures must find some expression, and the three sisters first send selections of their verse to a publisher. Timid about publicity—indeed having hitherto concealed, even from one another, what each had been secretly writing—they screen their identity behind names which retain their initials and are singularly vague as to sex except as this is revealed in their delicacy: “*Currer*,” “*Ellis*,” and “*Acton Bell*.” Emboldened by this venture in an unknown world, each writes a novel again secretly apart from the others. These first fruits intended for the public eye were Charlotte’s “*The Professor*,” Emily’s “*Wuthering Heights*” and Anne’s “*Agnes Grey*.” Judged by these three as first novels, Emily’s is unquestionably the work of greatest original genius. Charlotte’s never finds a publisher, which spurs her on to “*Jane Eyre*.” What do these ambitious authors know of life? They have gone to school and they have taught, but, too, in their pent-up existence, they have dreamed fierce dreams, and they have wandered over the wild hillsides and drunk in alternate strains the gentleness and the defiance of both earth and heaven. “*The Professor*” opens in the mill country of Yorkshire and passes to Brussels, as Charlotte did. The wild genius of “*Wuthering*

Heights'' is drawn from the dreary moors, and it is of imagination and spirit all compact. Little Anne's relation is that of a weary school-teacher, timid and thrust upon the world. Glory in the rich color of landscape is here, and morbidness is here too. Even Charlotte's physical shortsightedness is made a trait of her hero in a number of ways. The ideal clergyman is their father. There is the contrast between Northern brusqueness and the warmth and color of the South and the Continent. In reading, we are not thinking of the characters, but we are thinking of the individual expression of these three young people in an obscure Yorkshire parsonage. And what distorted mental pictures the reviewers drew! In the midst of the sick chamber, when the sisters have just buried the disgraced brother and the two younger ones are lingering in the shadow of death, Charlotte is writing to Mr. Williams:

The *North American Review* is worth reading; there is no mincing the matter there. What a bad set the Bells must be! What appalling books they write! To-day, as Emily appeared a little easier, I thought the *Review* would amuse her, so I read it aloud to her and Anne. As I sat between them at our quiet but now somewhat melancholy fireside I studied the two ferocious authors. Ellis, the "man of uncommon talents, but dogged, brutal, and morose," sat leaning back in his easy-chair, drawing his impeded breath as he best could and looking alas! piteously pale and wasted. It is not his wont to laugh, but he smiled, half amused and half in scorn, as he listened. Acton was sewing; no emotion even stirs him to loquacity, so he only smiled, too, dropping at the same time a simple word of calm amazement to hear his character so darkly portrayed. (Life, p. 388.)

It was Emily's only effort at novel-writing. A few heart-rending cries from the soul expressed in verse that have found a place in our anthologies of English poetry, and she was gone! The contrast with Charlotte has already been suggested. Charlotte, the older, accustomed to act and carry things through despite all obstacles as in writing her books; Emily, quiet and unobtrusive, musing and pondering always, like one of her own creations, masculine in will and thought. "She should have been a man," was the verdict of her teacher, M. Heger, in the Brussels *pensionnat*. She moves every one to admiration—M. Heger, her sister Charlotte, Mrs. Gaskell, and her latest critic, Mrs. Ward. In Charlotte's superb

words: "Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone." Mrs. Gaskell is constrained to comment: "Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans, great-granddaughter of the giants who used to inhabit the earth."

It was Emily as she could have been Charlotte was endeavoring to portray in the character of "Shirley," written at the time of this last illness. The episode of Emily and her dog, such another dog as the older brother quelled in DeQuincey's wretched childhood, reappears in "Shirley." Her stern spirit of independence gives us a brief glimpse beyond the veil of Brontë reticence. She was slowly dying, her life pulse sinking away, and she refused a physician to the last. She stood and smiled, but spoke not a word of the pains of death even then upon her. Such was the author of "Wuthering Heights." Defects are apparent enough to him who reads, but the overwhelming human interest remains: the bleakness of the Northern moors, aloofness from the petty world about, dreamings with nature and fierce passionate intuitions into the heart of things. Much is overwrought fantastical nonsense, and mingled with this are pages writ deep in human misery and life. It is elemental as the hills and vales are elemental, and what is elemental abides. There is the same kinship to the lonely, haunting, desolate landscape that Mr. Hardy found to his use in "The Return of a Native." Emily Brontë gave the atmosphere; Mr. Hardy had the art and the maturity also to make the creatures in that gloom move and live.

Charlotte's "Jane Eyre" stands closest to Emily's "Wuthering Heights." Exaggerations and faults are again patent enough. Its passion is the passionate revolt of the life of these young girls. Innocent we see them in act as unrestrained in their imaginations—a lack of restraint which seemed amazing to the novel-reading public of fifty years ago. Sympathies are worked on almost fiercely, and the chords respond. She had known what it was to be motherless, to suffer at school—the death of Helen Burns is that of her sister Maria; the matter of station and caste and dependence, morbidly dwelt upon, she drew from her govern-

ess experience; the actual shortcomings of the ecclesiastical enthusiast she had met with as the daughter of a parson and mentally rejected in an unconscious spirit of revolt to actualities, and now was substituted the imaginative longing for the unknown, the Byron-Branwell type of man that all Europe was mad over. The prospective wedding trip is in imagination a new "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." Much merriment has been had over "Mr. Rawchester," in which Mrs. Ward does not hesitate to join. It is a tale of morbid craving for sympathy and love absent from a life. Unreal in fact and imaginatively false it may be called, but the thought of such masterful men, if there are such still, with a doubtful and mysterious past does exercise a fascination over the girlish imagination. It may be held absurd, but it is nevertheless profoundly true. In the hold of passion on the human heart "Jane Eyre" remains still a masterpiece, and Charlotte Brontë is its priestess.

The outdoor feverish life is in "Jane Eyre" as in "Wuthering Heights," in the courtship, on the eve of marriage, and at the return. Here and there is an obvious suggestion of the theatrical instead of the dramatic. The straining and cracking of the chestnut bough under the storm and the striving of the soul—the stress of nature and life together—is both from the storm in "King Lear" and the author's own self; and the discovery of the wayfaring girl by the inmates of St. John's home, who are found to be relatives, reminds of Imogen and her brother in the caverns of Wales, though it is such kindness as the Brontë sisters themselves often exercised in the Samaritanism of their father's parsonage.

The love element is prominent in all her stories; it is already in "The Professor," it is in "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley" and "Villette." It is the heart and soul of her work and life. Novels to her meant the settling of this great question—to whom it was all the while an unknown and only dreamt of and imagined world. In both the novels and letters the changes are rung on the varying degrees of "respect, affection, and love."

But our paper is already drawing beyond its limits, and

there remains space for but a few concluding points on Charlotte's Brontë's personality. Numerous illustrations might be cited and opinions evidenced to show her provinciality and social inexperience—something inevitable, but which does not affect the total result. Patrick Brontë's family were devoted Church folk, true daughters of a country parson and true Britons. Her one contact with foreign life emphasizes her innate British insularity and narrowness, which she glories in. And in Great Britain she loves Yorkshire. To both English and American habits of thought this is clear. Certain Continental attitudes toward life and aspects of Roman Catholicism she viewed with open horror. Utterly unconscious in her righteous indignation, she can dogmatize at length just because certain things are foreign to Protestant and British and Yorkshire experience. At the time of her writing these things were cared for, for themselves; now they have the psychological interest of a study of Charlotte Brontë's mind. At the same time her enthusiasm on the subject of French was unbounded, and she takes a particular pride in using it in "*Shirley*" and "*Villette*" and elsewhere. It was clearly a case where an intimate knowledge of a foreign tongue and modes of speech helped her toward literary form. Her last novel, which most distinctly bears traces of the influence of the French sojourn, is the best constructed. French was to her a means of mental awakening as much as the study of German to George Eliot. She was interested in every detail of her Brussels experience, and believed others would be. This trait is strengthened by her love of description and didactic training. Her attitude is often that of the teacher: "Let me tell you, in order that you may know and be helped." Pedagogical details are brought out in "*The Professor*" and again in "*Villette*," the result of M. Heger's instruction, which made a profound impression—methods of teaching not the grammar of the language so much as the literature, and ways in which the literature could be both analyzed critically and constructed synthetically. She has humor, but it is not a humor practiced in the ways of the world. Charlotte's great admiration—and her literary

instincts were usually right—Thackeray, actually frightens her upon a personal encounter, and the bear took evident delight in growling, for which he afterwards made ample amends in the “Last Sketch.”

Interesting opinions on contemporary men and events are scattered through the novels and in the later letters. Particularly in her correspondence with her publishers she received fresh bundles of books, and was introduced to and kept in touch with a wider intellectual world. Unrestrained expressions on Thackeray and Dickens and Jane Austen and Balzac and George Sand and Rachel and Ruskin and Newman and Tennyson, and “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and similar subjects, become frequent. She is at last coming into her own, widening her mental horizon, and feeling that she is alive. Some sufferings, however, had been too deep ever to remove all limitations. She could not be reconciled to her idol Thackeray’s hearty admiration for Fielding. To her it is “the worship of his Baal,” and we can understand the reasons for the shrill heart cry: “Had I a brother living, I should tremble to let him read Thackeray’s lecture on Fielding. I should hide it away from him.”

Like most morbidly sensitive artistic natures, she suffered from the criticism of her books. Of her last, “Villette,” she writes: “I said my prayers when I had done it. . . . The book, I think, will not be considered pretentious, nor is it of a character to excite hostility.” This was a reflex of the smart still stinging from “Jane Eyre.” Indeed, we owe “Jane Eyre”—one proof of its perfect innocence—to this very absence and ignorance of all previous criticism. If Charlotte Brontë steadily gained in wideness of appeal in “Shirley,” and in consistency of construction and character in “Villette,” it was in “Jane Eyre” that flashed all that repressed passion and intensity of soul and frankness of utterance which in its precise kind was then new to the world, and still remains distinct.

JOHN BELL HENNEMAN.